

**Minutes of the Meeting of
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Strategy and Resources Committee
held at Headquarters, Shrewsbury
on Thursday, 17 March 2011 at 2.00 pm**

Present

Members

Councillors Mrs Barrow (Vice-Chair), Hartin (Chair), Hurst-Knight, Picken, Roberts and West

Officers

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer, Principal Accountant and Management Support Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Minnery.

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members that they should declare any personal and/or prejudicial interests at this point and that they should leave the meeting room before any item, in which they had a prejudicial interest, was discussed.

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Non-Exempt Minutes

Members received the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 January 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Barrow, seconded by Councillor Roberts, and

Resolved that the non-exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 January 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

4 Public Questions

No questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public.

5 Strategy and Resources Committee Work Plan 2011/12

This report reviewed progress against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2010 / 2011 Work Plan and put forward a 2011 / 2012 Work Plan for consideration and approval by Members.

It was proposed by Councillor West, seconded by Councillor Barrow, and

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note progress made against the Strategy and Resources Committee 2010 / 2011 Work Plan; and
- b) Approve the Work Plan 2011 / 2012, attached as an appendix to the report, with no amendments considered necessary.

6 Annual Report of the Strategy and Resources Committee

This report presented the draft version of the Annual Report of the Strategy and Resources Committee for consideration and approval by Members, prior to submission to the Fire Authority at its meeting in April 2011.

The Treasurer informed the meeting that the Committee's Terms of Reference need to be reviewed and amended, for example reference to Efficiency Statements should be removed.

Councillor Hartin commented that the Committee's remit had remained the same and that he was happy with this. Councillor Barrow as Vice-Chair of the Committee and Councillor West as Chair of the Fire Authority concurred with this.

It was proposed by Councillor West, seconded by Councillor Barrow, and

Resolved that the Committee approve the draft version of the Annual Report of the Strategy and Resources Committee, with no amendments being considered necessary.

7 Service Plan and Public Value Performance Measures

This report informed Members of further developments to produce and implement a meaningful and simplified annual Service Plan 2011/12 to support delivery of the Fire Authority's 'Medium Term Corporate Plan.'

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) explained that the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) had been an audit requirement and, as there was no longer a requirement to produce the BVPP, the Authority could now produce a simpler Service Plan.

The ACFO circulated a draft copy of the Plan and informed the Committee that a copy of the Plan would be produced in-house for each department and that the Plan would be supported by individual department or station plans which will drill down further into the targets.

The ACFO reported that the Audit and Performance Management Committee had considered and agreed the Public Value Measures but not the targets that sit within these measures.

Councillor Barrow referred to public value measure 1a and asked what the target currently was. The ACFO explained that there are currently 12 different response standards which vary according to where the incident is and what equipment is required. The target proposed in the Plan is simplified and reflects the importance that the community places on attendance at incidents.

Councillor Barrow then referred to public value measure 2 and asked what was being done to reduce the number of chimney fires. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) explained that various campaigns had been developed with the aim of driving down the number of chimney fires. There has been a focus on working with companies who install log burners etc to ensure that they are fitted and maintained correctly.

Councillor Picken asked about response standards for major incidents. The DCFO explained that the same response standards would apply, no matter what the type or size of the incident. Councillor Hartin asked about special appliances. The DCFO explained that there is a framework in place to deal with this.

The ACFO explained that all the recommendations contained within the report will maintain the Service's current performance levels.

Councillor Roberts suggested that the wording of aim 1 be changed from 'To be there where and when you need us...' to 'To be there when you need us...'

It was proposed by Councillor Barrow, seconded by Councillor West, and

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Having considered and debated them, agree the proposed targets, as set out in the report; and
- b) Approve the contents and layout of the draft Service Plan 2011/12.

8 Financial Issues Update

This report updated the Committee on financial matters arising since the last performance report, and sought approval for action, where necessary.

The Principal Accountant referred to paragraph 5 on page 2 of the report and explained that any additional design costs relating to the accommodation of Fire Control within the new headquarters building will be brought back to members. Councillor Hartin asked what the costs related to this currently were. The Principal Accountant responded that costs are currently £25,000.

The Principal Accountant then referred to the Reserves and Provisions as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report and explained that the Equipment Replacement Reserve is self funding. The Principal Accountant referred to the proposed establishment of the Information and Communications Technology Reserve and explained that once set up this would be easier to monitor and manage. Councillor Hartin suggested that consideration of recommendation e) in the report which related to this should be left until after the meeting had considered Agenda Item 9 – Information and Communication Technology. The Committee agreed with this.

The Principal Accountant also reported that the investment level detailed in paragraph 7 of the report is currently inflated but interest is currently below 1%.

Councillor Barrow queried the investment in Birmingham City Council. The Treasurer explained that English Local Authorities are rated as sound for investment as they have the ability to raise taxation therefore it is considered safe to lend to them. The Treasurer further explained that the investments are currently saving the Authority 5-6% on borrowing and that current investments are safe and sit within the Authority's strategy.

Councillor Hartin asked if there had been enough capacity within the new build to accommodate Fire Control. The DCFO explained that there was sufficient capacity and that there is still some spare capacity within the building. The ACFO explained that there had been a pinch point with regard to equipment accommodation and power supplies etc but this had been addressed. Councillor Barrow asked if the project had needed to go back to planning because of these changes. The DCFO confirmed that this had not been necessary.

Councillor West then proposed recommendations a) to d) as set out in the report. These were seconded by Councillor Barrow and it was

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority

- a) Note the position of the revenue budget;
- b) Approve an additional capital vote of £40,000 for the hybrid fire appliance in the 2010/11 capital programme;
- c) Note the financial issues of the St Michael's Street scheme;
- d) Note the current position on reserves and balances, and other balance sheet items; and

9 Information and Communication Technology

This report updated Members on the current position with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and requested that some £300,000 be moved from the capital reserve and other budgets for ICT capital expenditure into a specific 'ICT Improvements' Reserve budget, when closing the 2010/11 accounts.

The ACFO explained that there is a historic legacy regarding ICT planning which stems from issues such as Integrated Risk Management Planning and Fire Control. A review of the ICT Strategy is currently being undertaken and there may be opportunities to partner with other public sector bodies regarding the shared use of infrastructure assets such as Wide Area Networks (WAN). The ACFO advised that due to the pace of discussions with other organisations, the Fire Authority may be required to make an urgent decision on this matter.

Councillor Hartin asked if the proposed reserve figure was sufficient. It would appear that it is. Councillor Hartin then asked for an update on the situation with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (H&WFRS) and the memorandum of understanding regarding the mobilising system. The ACFO explained that the closing date for Hereford and Worcester's tender is today and their decision should be known tomorrow.

It was proposed by Councillor Hartin, seconded by Councillor West, and

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the contents of this paper;
- b) Agree to recommend to the Fire Authority that officers move some £300,000 from other related budgets into a new ICT Improvements reserve budget, on closing the 2010/11 accounts; and
- c) Task the Chief Fire Officer to report back to this Committee at each meeting on improvements to the ICT infrastructure, as set out in the paper.

8 Financial Issues Update

At this point the meeting returned to Agenda Item 8 – Financial Issues Update to consider recommendation e) which was subject to consideration of Agenda Item 9 – Information and Communication Technology.

It was proposed by Councillor Barrow, seconded by Councillor Roberts, and

Resolved that the Committee recommend that the Fire Authority

- e) Approve an Information and Communication Technology Improvements reserve.

10 Proposed Response – The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England (Consultation Exercise)

This report set out a proposed response, on behalf of the Fire Authority, to the Government's recently announced consultation exercise regarding the future of fire control services in England.

It was proposed by Councillor West, seconded by Councillor Barrow, and

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Approve the proposed response to the consultation document on behalf of the Fire Authority.

11 Fire Futures Report

This report summarised the five Fire Futures reports presented to the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, and suggested themes for a response for Authority Members.

The DCFO explained that Fire Futures covers the entire fire sector and highlighted the workstreams identified in the Fire Futures reports. The DCFO then talked through the conclusions reached by this Fire Authority, as set out in paragraph 6 of the report.

Councillor Hurst-knight commented that the Community Safety Partnership currently exists. The DCFO explained that the intention appears to be to extend this. The DCFO also reminded members that these are national proposals at the moment which aim to start the debate about the future structure of the fire sector etc.

Councillor Hartin commented that the Fire Futures project appears to have the potential to affect the Authority radically. The DCFO agreed with this especially as one of the proposals is to split commissioning and delivery of fire services, e.g. local communities would set response standards etc instead of fire authorities. The DCFO also reminded members that at this stage there was a limit to the clarity of the papers and the proposals contained in them.

Councillor Hartin proposed the recommendations as set out in the paper with the addition that recommendation b) be amended to read as follows:

‘Task officers with responding to the Minister with a report based on Member’s agreement and in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority and the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee’.

This was seconded by Councillor West, and it was

Resolved that the Committee

- a) Note, following discussion, the contents of the report; and
- b) Task officers with responding to the Minister with a report based on Member’s agreement and in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority and the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

12 Local Government Act 1972

Resolved that, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined by the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12(A) to the Act, by virtue of Paragraphs 3 and 4

13 Exempt Minutes

Members received the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 January 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor West, seconded by Councillor Barrow, and

Resolved that the exempt minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting, held on 20 January 2011, be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....